

# Civil-Military Relations and War Aims: A Principal-Agent Explanation

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This paper is very much a work in progress. I make no claim to be formal modeler – just a political scientist with idea that needs to be modeled. Please do not cite without author's permission.

### *Abstract*

Using a basic principal-agent framework to examine U.S. civil-military relations, Feaver (2003) explores when the military will work and when they will shirk, focusing on how efforts by civilian leaders to monitor and punish the military affects its behavior. What he does not consider is the impact that policy choice has on the military's behavior, particularly concerning the use of force. Whether the military will work or shirk will be greatly affected by what they are asked to do. When choosing war aims, democratic leaders face a strategic choice. National security is essential, but for civilians, so too is re-electability. Given the degree of expertise that military elites possess concerning the use of force, how do civilian leaders define war aims in order to maximize their own public support while minimizing the desire or incentives for the military to shirk? Using a simple formal model, I examine the trade-offs between political and military war aims.

*“In wartime, politicians always have a hard time gaining and maintaining authority against successful generals.” – Gerhard Ritter*

## **Introduction**

In civil-military relations, one of the great challenge for civilian leaders is how to minimize concessions to the military (Feaver 2003). Nowhere is this more difficult than in decisions about the use of force. The expertise gap in favor of the military is greatest in this area, putting civilian elites at a grave disadvantage. Given these dynamics, how do civilian leaders select their war aims in order to maximize public support for their policy while minimizing the desire or incentives for the military to shirk? Using a simple formal model, I examine the trade-offs between political and military war aims.

Civilian and military leaders have a common preference for guaranteeing national security. Where their preferences may diverge, however, concerns how to best meet that goal. In a democracy, when force is used, civilian leaders select the policy – outlining the basic war aims for the country. Some of these aims give the military autonomy in their area of expertise. Military objectives of this nature include liberate Kuwait, destroy al-Qaeda, take Omaha Beach, etc. The military prefers this type of objective that gives them greater autonomy and allows them the ability to go on the offensive. These objectives are also often characterized by the need for a high level of force (or overwhelming force) in order to achieve them.

On the other hand, civilian leaders, particularly in recent years, have also had more political war aims that limit the actions of the military such as maintain support for American actions from the rest of the world, hold together an international coalition, minimize collateral damage, etc. While these goals may increase public support for military action, this type of political objective is not preferred by the military as it can limit both action and autonomy. Using a high level of force can also be counter-productive for this type of goal.

How do civilians leaders select the appropriate level for force, given the trade-offs between these empowering military and negating political types of goals? Within a principal-agent understanding of civil-military relations, this is a strategic decision. Civilian leaders do not want to jeopardize the larger goal of security, but they must also attend to political goals – often for both international and domestic reasons. By hamstringing the military with lower levels of force than desired, the probability of guaranteeing security decreases. In addition, when more political aims are included, the more likely the military agent is to shirk because the difference in the preferences between the principal and the agent is greater.

## Civil-Military Relations in America

Traditional explanations of civil-military relations focus on how political leaders can control what is typically the largest and potentially the most dangerous element of their own governments – the military. Given the coercive advantage the military possesses, how can political leaders effectively assert civilian control? Understanding civil-military relations in democracies is a special challenge, given that unlike in other systems, military leaders rarely, if ever, directly challenge their civilian superiors. The absence of coups, however, does not indicate an absence of conflict between civilian and military leaders in democratic societies.

The most notable work on the topic of democratic civil-military relations is Huntington's *The Soldier and the State* (1957). To Huntington (1957), the key to civil-military relations is allowing military professionals oversee military matters. Civilians should control the decision to use force, but they should not interfere with the military on matters of strategy or tactics. Using “objective control,” civilians can depend on the the professionalism of the military to refrain from political action and provide the best military outcomes possible.<sup>1</sup> From this perspective, Vietnam is a great failing of civil-military re-

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<sup>1</sup>He contrasts this idea of objective control with that of subjective control, which would see effort by civilian leaders to control the military and remake it in the image of civilian society.

lations because of efforts by the Johnson administration to micro-manage the war (Cohen 2002).<sup>2</sup>

To make his case, Huntington (1957) highlights the role of external threats, the constitutionally defined relationship between civilian leadership and the military, and the ideological makeup of society as factors that shape a state's civil-military relations. Building on Huntington's (1957) work, Desch (1999) focuses on the importance of external threat. Tensions between civilian and military elites will be mitigated by the presence of an external threat. He suggests that the perceived civil-military crisis in the United States during the 1990s was caused most directly by the disappearance of the Soviet threat. Without a clear common enemy, civilian leaders and military elites are more likely to butt heads. Recognizing that overt military challenges to civilian power (such as coups) are rare in democracies, Desch (1999) examines which side prevails when civilian and military preferences diverge in the United States, highlighting the threat environment in which the divergence occurs.

Despite the fact that Huntington's model is so pervasive that it is often considered to be the "normal theory of civil-military relations" and that it mirrors the sentiments of much of the military itself, Huntington's assertion about the centrality of "objective control" does not go unchallenged. Cohen (2002) argues (and echoes Clausewitz in doing so) that politics and war are not as distinct and separable as traditional explanations of civil-military relations (like Huntington's) posit them to be. Using case studies of several eminent democratic wartime leaders like Lincoln and Churchill, Cohen suggests that the best outcomes arise in civil-military relations when civilian leaders do not leave military leaders alone as Huntington prescribes, but rather when civilian leaders question and press military leaders every step of the way.

Other challenges to Huntington have risen from a more sociological perspective. While Huntington suggests that the military, particularly the officers are more conservative than

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<sup>2</sup>Cooper (2001) disputes this portrayal of Vietnam, particularly Operation Rolling Thunder, which he considered to be a failure of strategy (emanating from both civilian and military elites) rather than a failure of delegation.

the mass American public, Moskos (1974), Sarkesian (1981), and Janowitz (1960) find evidence that the military resembles America – both demographically and ideologically.<sup>3</sup> If this is the case, the tension between military and civilian values that Huntington highlights may not exist. Janowitz (1960) suggests this is because nuclear weapons have changed the nature of war. As modern warfare requires more technology and less raw aggression, the differences between members of the military and the general public have disappeared. He suggests that Huntington’s theory may apply to the first half of the 20th Century, it is less applicable after World War II.

In contrast to the approaches discussed above, Feaver (2003) conceptualizes civil-military relations as a specific type of principal-agent relationship. Feaver explores how efforts by civilian leaders to monitor and punish the military affect the propensity of the military to work and shirk.<sup>4</sup> In his model, the policy is established prior to the strategic interaction, ignoring how *what* the military is asked to do affects whether or not they do it. In this paper, I correct this shortcoming focusing directly on policy formulation.

## Civil-Military Relations as a Principal-Agent Problem

The literature on principal-agent relationships can be traced to Weber (1958), who examined asymmetric relationships between two sides – one of which possessed authority (the principal), the other information (agent) (Miller 2005). Formalized by economists to explore the dilemmas that arise when authority is delegated, principal-agent models have frequently been employed by scholars of American politics to examine the relationships between both the legislative and executive branches and the federal bureaucracy

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<sup>3</sup>This may have changed as a 1999 study found a growing identification of the officer corps with the Republican Party. Fewer and fewer officers are identifying themselves as Independents and more are identifying as Republicans at a rate of 8:1 while the general population is much more evenly split between the two parties (Feaver 2003).

<sup>4</sup>The terms “work” and “shirk” do not apply as cleanly in this context as they do in PA models with economic applications, so I adopt Feaver’s definitions for the civil-military relations context. The military is working when they are doing what the civilian leadership asks them to do. On the other hand, the military is shirking when they deviate from the demands of the civilian leaders. Examples of this type of behavior are discussed in greater detail below.

(including Kiewit and McCubbins 1991; Bendor 1998) as well as efforts by voters to control elected officials (Ferejohn 1986). Moe (1984) highlights the primary challenge of this type of relationship as “hierarchical control in the context of information asymmetry and conflict of interest.” More recently, P-A models have been applied by scholars of international relations (Downs and Rocke 1994; Davies 2002; Chapman and Reiter 2004).

In a principal-agent model, the principal’s primary goal is to structure its relationship with the agent (often through a contract) in a way that encourages the agent to act in accordance with the principal’s preferences rather than his or her own. As a result, incentives are critical to principal-agent models. Principals want to propose a contract (or in this case, a level of force) that maximizes the principal’s desired outcome by getting the agent to accept the proposed contract and to work hard to achieve that outcome. Principals incur agency costs when their agents engage in undesired action or when the principal expends resources to monitor the agent. Divergent preferences over outcomes can also lead to agency costs; these are the costs upon which I focus.

For any principal (whether they be an individual voter or democratic leader) to want to delegate authority to an agent, that agent must possess some private information that is unavailable to the principal.<sup>5</sup> As an agent, the military possesses experience and technical expertise that creates an informational advantage over the civilian principal. This informational asymmetry is especially important in the civil-military context. While the civil principal does possess private information about his level of risk acceptance, the military’s expertise on military matters creates a significant informational advantage over civilians in the areas of tactics and logistics (Feaver 2003). This advantage is even greater in times of war, forcing civilian leaders to grant the military even greater independence. Unfortunately, most studies of civil-military relations (including Feaver’s) do not focus on times of war and the use of force, instead concentrating on the day-to-day relations between civilian and military elites. The principal-agent relationship between civilians

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<sup>5</sup>PA models have also been used to model the use of force where the American public was considered to be the principal and the commander in chief was thought of as the agent (Chapman and Reiter 2004).

and the military is further complicated by the desire of civilians for advice from the military – advice that will influence the policy decisions the military will be asked to implement.

In order to gain the information possessed by the agent, principals must use incentives. In many cases, principals are often willing to grant greater autonomy to their agents. As a result, principal-agent models often highlight the trade-offs between agent independence (which allows principals to benefit from the agent’s expertise) and bureaucratic drift as the agent works to obtain its own preferred outcome, often at the expense of the principal’s preference. How can principals grant independence to their agents without losing control of their actions? Huntington notes that the military is often given a great deal of autonomy in matters of war-fighting. Can civilian leaders use their power to set war aims to gain their preferences with regards to military outcomes?

Previous work has not considered the strategic role that policy choice may play in civil military relations. Civilian leaders must make critical decisions about the use of force and war aims, but those decisions are influenced by advice given by the military, who will in turn be asked to carry out those decisions.<sup>6</sup> One of the key variables in P-A models is the divergence of preferences between the principals and their agents. If a difference in preferences affects behavior, civilian leaders may have an incentive to choose policies closer to the preferences of military rather than their own true preferences in order to guarantee the foremost goal of national security (which is shared by both civilians and the military).

The goal for both civilian and military leaders in this game is to maximize security. In a traditional principal-agent game, this maximization would be subject to two constraints – a participation constraint (agents are able to opt out if they do not prefer the contract

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<sup>6</sup>Unlike Avant (1994), I assume the civilian leadership to be a unitary actor. This assumption, which is also made by Feaver (2003), has been criticized as limiting (Sowers 2005; Bacevich 1998; Burk 1998), but I believe this is a necessary simplification. In Avant’s model, she focuses on the possibility of a divided principal (the President versus Congress) and the ways in which the military may attempt to manipulate the PA relationship under those circumstances. Since I focus on the selection of war aims, which are selected by the commander in chief, I believe this is an appropriate simplifying assumption in this case.

offered by the principal) and an incentive constraint (benefits necessary to entice agents to work rather than to shirk). Here, the maximization is only subject to the later constraint as the military cannot opt out. They may choose to shirk by foot-dragging or using other delay tactics, but they cannot refuse to fight if ordered to do so by the principal.

An example of shirking behavior can be seen in the case of Kosovo. While the military did not refuse to participate in the NATO campaign, they went so far as to drag their feet on supplying certain forces to Gen. Wesley Clark's NATO operation. This was true with supplies as well as the military delayed for weeks in sending Clark the Apache attack helicopters he had requested and then never allowed him to actually use them (Desch 1999).

Similarly, the military may inflate estimates of troops, costs, or supplies necessary for a given operation as a means of shirking. In the run up to the 1991 Gulf War, then deputy security advisor Robert Gates suggests that he believed the original troop request was overly high, saying "The White House had become accustomed over the years to the military coming in with large force requirements for contingency plans. This was clearly partly out of caution, but there was also a perception that at times it was to dissuade the President from action," (Gordon and Trainor 1995, 154). While unable to opt out of military action if order, the military may attempt to use its advisory influence to dissuade civilian leaders from taking actions that not preferred by the military.

Another form of shirking has become more common since the end of the Cold War. Beginning with an unprecedented editorial in the *New York Times* by Colin Powell making a case against military action in Bosnia (Desch 1999), more and more generals (both retired and active duty) have taken on the role of mouthpiece for their comrades in uniform who are not in position to criticize the administration in office. This type of critique has become more commonplace during the current campaign in Iraq (see Ricks 2006). Even serving officers at lower ranks have become more vocal in the dissent with the Bush administration's decisions about the use of force (examples include Bumiller 2007).

Because the principal wishes to maximize security, the incentives are very important. Since shirking is the only method that military agents have to express their displeasure with the task at hand, the civilian principal must carefully consider the its policy choices in order to maximize the likelihood of faithful adherence to its policies by the military.

Principal-agent models provide insight into circumstances that might lead to moral hazard.<sup>7</sup> Uncertainty in this model is introduced in how faithfully the military acts in accordance with the civilian leaders' preferences. This is an issue of moral hazard. When an agent's preferences differ from those of the principal and the agent's actions (or level of effort) are not fully observable as may be the case in war, the principal must devise incentives to get the agent to act as it desires.

## Order of Moves

To formalize the dynamics that occur between the civilian leadership and the military on decisions concerning the use of force, a simple game-theoretic model is characterized below. The behavior of two actors – both civilian and military leaders – is considered. Complete information is assumed and thus the game can be solved by backwards induction.

The first move of the game is made by the military. Typically in PA models, the game begins with a contract proposal from the principal that can be either accepted or reject by the agent. An important modification in the model offered here is a reversal of this initial step. When an external threat arises, the military agent makes the initial proposal rather than the civilian principal. Because of their technical expertise and logistical experience, proposals about an appropriate response to an external threat originates from the military. Given the informational asymmetries in the principal-agent relationship between military and civilian leaders, the military is in a better position to make the initial offer.

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<sup>7</sup>Principal-agent models are also used to explore problems of adverse selection, but civilian leaders are not uncertain about the true nature of the United States military as an agent.

To keep this model simple, when an external threat arises (at a level that is known to both players), the military can propose no use of force or a high or low level of force. Based on one of these three proposals, the civilian leadership must decide whether to accept the proposed level of force or to offer its own alternative. The civilian leaders have the same proposal options available to them as well.

After the military makes its proposal, the executive as commander-in-chief has the final say about policies concerning the use of force. If the principal disagrees with the military's proposal, it has the option to recontract, offering an alternative proposal that must be accepted by the military. Recontracting is costly, as the civilian leadership must expend considerable time and resources to consult outside sources to create an alternative policy. A clear example of recontracting can be seen in the First Gulf War. Unsatisfied by the frontal land-based attack proposed by General Schwarzkopf and backed by the JCS, then Secretary of State Cheney canvassed the Department of Defense for alternative ideas. The suggestion to begin the war with an air campaign came from outside the traditional military chain of command, which greatly upset then head of the Joint Chiefs Colin Powell (Cohen 2002).<sup>8</sup> Because of recontracting is costly, there is an incentive for civilian leaders to accept the military's proposal if the divergence of preferences is not great.

Neither the military nor the civilians know with certainty whether or not each level of force will result in security. The likelihood of obtaining security is probabilistic, based on the level of force used. Both parties also assign values to each of the potential policy options (abbreviated as C and M for the respective actors). Based on espoused doctrine such as the Powell-Weinburger Doctrine of Overwhelming Force, I assume that the military's preferences are  $M_{high} > M_{sq} > M_{low}$ . For their part, the civilians recognize that the use of force is costly; therefore, their most preferred outcome is the status quo ( $C_{sq}$ ). Beyond that, however, civilians are indifferent between high and low levels of force

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<sup>8</sup>This is a somewhat interesting turn of events since initially Powell was opposed to the First Gulf War (Woodward 1991).

$(C_{low} = C_{high})$ .

The final choice is made by the military – to faithfully implement the decision made by the civilian leaders (work) or to deviate from it (shirk). If the military dislikes the level of force chosen by the civilian leaders, they do not have the option of refusing to carry out the policy. They can, however, shirk, which may take many forms as described above. The military’s rationale for shirking might be that if the civilians policy does not appear to be successful, the military could be able to shift the policy back to their initial proposal. The more the military values that original proposal, the more likely they are to shirk.<sup>9</sup> The order of moves is illustrated in Figure 1. Complete information concerning the components that make up these payoffs and the assumptions can be found in the appendix. For each outcome, the payoff for the military is listed first.

[Insert Figure 1]

## Implications

From this basic model it is possible to characterize three distinct equilibria. The first and least interesting one in terms of strategic dynamics between the principal and agent are the circumstances when the civilian leadership opts for no response, and thus security remains at the status quo.<sup>10</sup>

A second equilibrium occurs when the military’s initial proposal is accepted and the military works to put its proposal into action. This equilibrium holds when several important conditions are true. First, given the preferences of the military, it will only propose to use no force or to use force at a high level. Their least preferred outcome is low level force, and under complete information, there is no incentive for them to propose such a policy. Thus, this equilibrium results from a proposal of a high level of force by

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<sup>9</sup>Do I need this now? This parameter helps to capture the distance between the preferences of the two actors. As the difference between A and the policy chosen by the civilians increases, the greater the likelihood of shirking.

<sup>10</sup>This equilibrium can arise in two ways – when the military proposes no use of force and this proposal is accepted, or when the civilians recontract to no use of force.

the military and the acceptance of that proposal by the civilians.

Secondly, for the equilibrium to hold, the effort associated with working cannot exceed the resulting security benefits. More precisely, the military will work when:

$$E \leq l_w(S) - l_s(S) \tag{1}$$

By assumption, the probability of gaining security with work always exceeds that of the probability of gaining security when shirking, thus the right side of the inequality will always be positive. When the utility associated with security is high and/or the probability of gaining that utility is high, this inequality is likely to be satisfied. Unless the cost of effort is extremely high, it appears that when the military is presented with its own proposal, it is likely to work. The special significance afforded by the military to notion of honor is critical here. Feaver (2003) suggests that honor is the second highest preference for the military directly after guaranteeing security. This desire for honor mitigates the likelihood of shirking under these circumstances. Additionally, given that this equilibrium arises from the military's own proposal, it is also unlikely that the military make a proposal with an unacceptably high effort cost.

The idea that the military will work whenever its proposal is accepted by the civilian leadership is noteworthy. Even without monitoring, which is the linchpin of Feaver's (2003) model, this equilibrium holds. Civilian leaders know that accepting the policy proposal of the military will be cheaper than paying the costs associated with recontracting. This knowledge creates a strong incentive for civilians to take the advice of the military and accept their proposals in most cases, given the military a strong position in this principal-agent scenario.

A final equilibrium occurs when the civilian leaders reject the initial proposal of the military (either for no use of force or for a high use of force) and offer an alternate policy – a low force alternative. Under most conditions, the military will opt to shirk in hopes of changing the civilians' minds. The military will shirk when this inequality holds:

$$q(O) \leq l_w(S) - l_s(S) - E \quad (2)$$

Now the choice to work is not only affected by the effort associated with work (as was the case in the previous equilibrium), but it is also influenced by the value that the military assigns to their original policy (O). Thus, the greater the divergence in preferences between the civilians and the military, the less likely the military is to work.

Here is where we see the importance of monitoring highlighted by Feaver (2003). When the preferences of the principal and the agent diverge, monitoring is essential to guarantee work by the military. When the military and the civilians have the same preferences (evidenced by the civilians accepting the military's proposal), the military will opt to work. As the conditions under which recontracting occurs, at least in regards to the use of force, are rare, the importance of monitoring may be overstated in Feaver's work.

Knowing that the military will likely shirk if the civilians refuse their initial proposal, the civilian leadership will only recontract under limited circumstances. They will only do so when the costs of recontracting are lower than the differences in the two competing policies and the expected utility of security associated with those policies. For example, the civilians will only move the policy from a high military proposal to a low counterproposal when:

$$R \leq C_l - C_h + l_w(S) - l_s(S) \quad (3)$$

This inequality will only hold under limited circumstances, meaning that it is unlikely that the civilians will reject the military's proposal unless they choose to remain at the status quo and require no use of force. In matters of the use of force, the civilian leadership will almost always defer to the military's proposal.

## Discussion

Now that I've demonstrated that divergent preferences affect the strategic behavior of the two actors in the civil-military relations game, I'd like to consider circumstances under which such divergence of preferences might arise. Generally, both military and civilian elites have a strong preference to guarantee national security. The disagreement comes in how to guarantee that security.

When making decisions about the use of force, civilian leaders of democracies have an incentive to use exactly the amount of force necessary. This gets to electability; civilian leaders do not want to select policies that lead to higher casualties and higher costs than necessary. While civilian leaders want to win wars, they also want to win elections.<sup>11</sup> George W. Bush campaigned in 2000 on the idea of transforming the military, and under the guidance of his first Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld, he set about doing this to create a lighter, faster, more efficient force that could do more with less (Woodward 2003, 2006), which appealed to the electorate.

To win elections, civilian leaders must consider the preferences of the voting public. The public supports wars that are perceived to be vital to national interest and when they think we are going to win (Feaver and Gelpi 2004). Gaining support for wars when there is a clear and meaningful external threat is relatively easy, but civilian elites have to work harder to gain/maintain support for low threat wars. In the 1990s, American public support was weaker for US participation in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Somalia, where the threat to national security was less clear.<sup>12</sup> In these less threatening situations, the American public is more concerned about casualties and costs (Feaver, Gelpi, Reifler 2006). These concerns were part of the motivation for proposing a transformation of the military by the Bush Administration, as it was seen as a way to lower both costs and

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<sup>11</sup>Feaver (2003, 100) does discuss these electoral costs, but his game begins after policy selection has already occurred, so it is difficult to see how these electoral costs might trade-off with what he refers to as policy costs (the gap between the desired policy and the actual outcome).

<sup>12</sup>Another possibility might be that the civilian leadership is less concerned about shirking in these low threat wars. If the public is asking for the government to "do something", shirking might be less damaging to the American cause.

casualties over the long-term.

With an eye to creating a publicly acceptable war policies, civilian leaders may be inclined to include more political war aims, which will decrease the level of force they are willing to approve. Typically, these political war aims place greater limitations on the autonomy of the military and are less preferred by the military agent than simple military war aims. Sullivan (2007) makes a similar, but not identical division of war aims when she talks about brute force objectives (which can be achieved with force alone) and coercive objectives (which can only be achieved with compliance from others). Her conclusions, however, may have bearing here as she finds that leaders are more likely to underestimate the amount of force needed to achieve coercive objectives than they are brute force objectives. In addition, these compliance-dependent goals are more difficult to translate into clear military objectives and harder to evaluate in terms of strategic success and military effectiveness (Sullivan 2007).

For their part, military leaders prefer to use more than necessary. A clear expression of this preference can be seen in the Powell Doctrine of Overwhelming Force.<sup>13</sup> Woodward (2006) describes this principle in action during the run-up to the Persian Gulf War. Then-Secretary of Defense Cheney asked head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell about the necessary troop numbers and what would be needed to guarantee offensive capacity in the war. Powell relayed this question to General Schwarzkopf, and then Powell added two extra divisions on top of Schwarzkopf's assessment. On top of that, Powell asked for an additional 200,000 troops. George H. W. Bush's response was, "If that's what you need, we'll do it." Here we see a clear example of the military offering its proposal for a high level of force and the civilian leaders acquiescing to that proposal.

The military's foremost preference is to win wars, elections are irrelevant. This motivates them to propose greater than necessary force. When a bad policy decision is made concerning the use of force the voting public can replace the civilian leaders responsible.

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<sup>13</sup>The Powell Doctrine has evolved from the so-called Weinberger Doctrine (named for Reagan's Secretary of Defense and Powell's former boss Casper Weinberger, who sought to avoid the mistakes of Vietnam with clear principles about the circumstances for the use of force) (Cohen 2002).

Accountability for military leaders is less direct and is not controlled by the public (Desch 1999).

As a result, the military's preferences are more likely to mirror those of their civilian principals when the focus is on military war aims rather than political war aims which often accompany low force missions. When more political war aims are included, the preferences between the principal and the agent are likely to be more divergent because of the absent of public accountability for military leaders.

Another possibility is that when public support for war is low, the likelihood of remaining at the status quo may be increased, especially if the military proposes a high force level in response. Unwilling to pay the material costs and risk electoral ire, the civilian leadership may prefer to use no force rather than recontract to lower the force level. On the flip side, this may create a counter-intuitive incentive for the military in its advisory role to propose a high level of force in cases where it would prefer not to send troops.<sup>14</sup> This may have been the case when the Clinton administration initially asked for estimates on a military option in Kosovo (Desch 1999).

The nature of civil-military relations in democracies results in strategic interaction between the two sides. Civilian elites want to select war aims that will defeat an international enemy, maintain their re-electability with the public, and guarantee minimal shirking on the part of the military. Military elites want to provide advice that will lead to war aims that will defeat an international enemy. The interaction is strategic because civilian elites make certain policy decisions based on what they expect the military to do and vice versa.

The choice by the civilian leadership to recontract under these conditions is very rare. Recent events in Iraq provide an interesting example. The experiences of the Bush administration (and especially those of the Rumsfeld Defense Department) demonstrate the potential risks of shirking that civilians run if they choose to recontract on issues of

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<sup>14</sup>This dynamic, while potentially intriguing, is difficult to capture in a complete information model. Both sides know the level of the external threat and what the probability is for gaining security for each option. Bluffing cannot be captured in this set up.

the use of force.

Beginning in 2002, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz pulled together a group of thinkers to create a comprehensive report on the state of affairs in the Middle East. While suggestions about going after Saddam's Iraq surfaced nearly immediately after 9/11 (Woodward 2004), this group's report posited that Iraq might be the best place to start to transform the region as it was weakest link in the Middle East. They concluded that it would be difficult for the military to deal with Egypt and Saudi Arabia, home to the majority of the 9/11 terrorists. Dealing with Iran would also be challenging, but Iraq seemed vulnerable. Getting rid of Saddam was step one in their minds to transform the region (Woodward 2006).

This is only one example of the Rumsfeld Defense Department's efforts to field alternative ideas about the War on Terror from outside the military establishment. In part, this results from the new type of threat posed by global terrorism, but it also indicates a broader desire of the civilian leadership to assert its control and influence over the military establishment (Woodward 2006).<sup>15</sup>

In the run up to the Iraq War, there are other examples of this recontracting behavior. Rumsfeld and others also rejected suggests about force size, notably those of Gen. Eric Shinseki (Desch 2007). Shinseki squared off against the Department of Defense on several occasions prior to the March 2003 invasion, including directly telling Rumsfeld that "the mission is huge, that you need a lot of troops to secure all the borders and do all the tasks you need to do" (Ricks 2006). He reported to Congress that several hundred thousand troops would eventually be needed; at the same time, Wolfowitz gave Congress a figure of 34,000. Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld prevailed. Army historian Conrad Crane later noted, "It was not clear to us until much later how unsuccessful General Shinseki and his staff had been in shaping the final plans" (quoted in Ricks 2006).

Since the Bush Administration proceeded with their plans to invade Iraq, numerous

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<sup>15</sup>For its part, an Army study group convened in 2002 concluded that "the possibility of the United States winning the war and losing the peace is real and serious" (quoted in Ricks 2006).

public statements have been made by current and former military personnel that certainly border on shirking, if not outright insubordination. Solid civil-military relations are unlikely to result in former colonels referring to the Secretary of Defense's war plans as "amateurish" (Ricks 2006). Several top generals including Shinseki have also opted to retire rather than continue down what they consider to be the flawed course charted by the Bush administration.

Seemingly aware of the possibility of shirking, Rumsfeld worked quickly to establish civilian control over post-invasion Iraq under former diplomat Paul Bremer, replacing retired Army General Jay Garner. Following Feaver (2003), this type of intrusive monitoring is necessary to spur the military to work, especially when they are not pursuing their most preferred policies.

When making decisions about the use of force, civilians are at a great information disadvantage. This model demonstrates just how strong the incentives are for civilian leaders to accept the advice of their military counterparts. Recent events also reveal how difficult is for civilians to devise alternate policies that will be carried out with the same enthusiasm as the military's original proposals. It can be done – as FDR proved in World War II when he overrode the advice of his advisors and sent American troops first to North Africa rather than Europe (Cohen 2002), but this seems to be the exception and not the rule.

## **Conclusion**

Recent events have again made civil-military relations in the United States a key concern. Since the end of the Cold War, the disappearance of the Soviet threat and the increased interest in non-traditional military actions have heightened the natural tension between the military and the civilian elites. As civilians have asked the military to take on more political responsibilities, preferences between the two groups have diverged – increasing concerns about shirking.

Military leaders, whose attention is necessarily focused on tactics and operational planning, do not have the full range of political information available to them. As a result, Cooper (2001) notes “rules of engagement and target selection will always be required to conform to political objectives. Those political objectives are articulated by civilians, who, to be sure, should know when to show restraint.” The relationship between civilian and military leaders will continue to be contentious, but particularly for democratic states, Clausewitz’ (1976) words ring true –

The subordination of the political point of view to the military would be contrary to common sense, for policy has declared the War; it is the intelligent faculty, War only the instrument, not the reverse. The subordination of the military point of view to the political, is therefore, the only thing which is possible.

An important future direction for this work is to expand the choice set for the two actors. Right now, decisions in the model are constrained to be discrete. Allowing a continuous range of policy choices for both actors brings to model closer to real world conditions and gives greater insight into these dynamics. Relatedly, I plan to consider both political and military war aims and trade-off between those two in future iterations of this model. Presently, the model considers high levels of force to be non-conducive to achievement of political aims, but this is not necessarily the case. As the nature of conflict continues to evolve and as the expectations about the behavior of democratic states in war change, I believe questions about civil-military relations will take on greater importance.

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## Appendix

### Complete Payoffs

- **C** and **M** – utility for civilians and military associated with each policy (noted by subscripts: sq, low, high)
- **S** – security
- $l_w/l_s$  – probability of gaining security with low level force for both working (w) and shirking (s).
- $h_w/h_s$  – probability of gaining security with high level force for both working (w) and shirking (s).
- **O** – military's value for its original proposal. When the military chooses to shirk, it will receive this payoff with probability  $q$ , which is the likelihood that the civilians will alter the policy.
- **R** – cost associated with recontracting
- **E** – cost associated with the effort of working

### Assumptions

- $M_{high} > M_{sq} > M_{low}$
- $C_{sq} > C_{high} = C_{low}$
- $l_w \geq l_s$  and  $h_w \geq h_s$

